

## I Remember

By Karen Monast

I remember when I was going out every Friday and Saturday night hoping to meet “someone.” Most of the time I ended up sitting on a barstool drinking alone in a loud, crowded room with a bunch of people I didn’t know and feeling depressed. That was my ‘dating scene’ when I was first out. I hated it. The noise. The crowd. The insecurity of being alone, the fear that if I smiled at someone they would think I was trying to pick them up. Whether or not anyone would talk to me. Not that talking is possible with the music blasting away so loud that even a scream couldn’t be heard. Trying to start a conversation with someone in hopes that we could spend time together. The only time I ever thought about “older” gays and lesbians was when occasionally one or two would show up at the current hot spot looking out of place.

It never occurred to me that there were older gays and lesbians out there somewhere! I suppose the “out of sight, out of mind” rule applies here. When I was going to the bars, “we” didn’t have anywhere else to meet others like ourselves. And being young we never thought about what happened to those who came before us and where they all went. I guess we just thought they all dropped off the edge of the earth.

As I began to age and finally met my life partner, we never went out to the bars and only sporadically attended any of the area gay and lesbian events. As a couple we did things that most couples do, work, pay bills, attend family functions, and go on vacations. We grew away from the gay community as our everyday life filled up with everyday things. Once in a while we would try to reach out to “belong” somewhere within the gay community only to have the everyday essentials again pull us away.

Now that we are older and don’t have as many outside distractions claiming our attention, we have again reached out to find a place within the gay community. I am happy to say that so many things have changed in Rochester’s gay and lesbian community since I could only be out at a “gay bar.” We now have here in Rochester so much diversity, the group for our young, our people of color, our churches, and so much more.

The most important group for me at this time in my life is Rainbow Seniors of Western New York. Surprise! Older gay men and lesbians DO EXIST! Not only that but we exist together without the ‘separatism’ that I used to find at the bars. We come together to work and build a safe place for those of us who want to have a connection to “our” community other than the bars we were chained to in our youth. We are a diverse social group for older gay, lesbian, bi and transgender persons of all ethnic and religious backgrounds. We welcome all to join with us.

As a social organization we have several once-a-month events: a potluck, euchre club and yoga class. For the past four years, we have sponsored an intergenerational panel with the Youth Group (last month March 18<sup>th</sup>). That event has grown bigger and better every year. It is a wonderful opportunity for the youth to see that older gays and lesbians do exist and don’t just fade away. This spring we will be holding our fourth dance

“Somewhere Over the Rainbow.” Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 PM until 10 PM at the Roger Roach Community Center. Reserve your tickets by calling 585.234.1290. Look for the ad in this paper or check out our website, [www.rainbowseniorswny.org](http://www.rainbowseniorswny.org). I’ve never seen anyone leave with a frown on their face! Truly, this event is attended by all ages and we have a really good time. Remember though, as with all RSWNY events this event is drug and alcohol free.